Explain what Monteverdi meant by seconda pratica and show how this 'second practice' is reflected in three of his madrigals.

The term 'seconda pratica' has suffered from somewhat nebulous usage by commentators throughout history, though it is traditionally understood as the stylistic opposition of the music of Monteverdi and certain colleagues to the strict style of Palestrina and his Roman contemporaries. Although the term tends to be used to explain almost any innovation in Italian music of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it is best appreciated as Monteverdi's way of justifying his controversial deviations from the traditional rules of composition in the face of hostility from theorists such as Giovanni Maria Artusi. In a broader sense, the Second Practice represents a new aesthetic approach to the composition of music with words, in which the text is raised to a level of equal or superior value to the music, guiding its course. Tim Carter[1] compares Monteverdi's stance to those of Guarini defending Il Pastor Fido and Galilei the new cosmology, however Monteverdi believed that he was following a tradition of humanist thinking that dated back at least a century. The humanists regarded music as an expressive art, and sought ways of increasing its expressive power. They held in high regard 'the passions themselves, as determinants of human actions, and…the artist's ability to arouse these passions.'[2] And these thinkers, of whom the 'Camerata' of Florence were at the forefront, found fault with the music they heard in the late sixteenth century. The music, in their view, was incapable of moving the passions; it was unfaithful to the ways of the ancient Greeks, who were greatly revered at this time.

The problem, it seems, lay with counterpoint itself; the mixtures of high and low sound and of fast and slow movement were seen as enemy of the words. Furthermore, some composers saw no problem in breaking up the flow of the text, repeating words to fit a coherent musical structure. Caccini went as far as to call this 'laceramento della poesia' – the 'laceration of poetry.'[3] Galilei claimed that the ancients, by contrast, had esteemed solo singing above counterpoint, believing that a single melody had more expressive power. The ancient melodies, apparently, were simple too, with syllabic declamation, no repetition of words and only two time values – either long or short. Modern music was therefore seen as too complex, with its multiple melodies, melismas, repetitions and ornaments.

The answer was to develop a style of music in which the melody dominated, with a simple, supporting accompaniment and ideally sung by a solo voice. The melody would have a limited tessitura and its rhythms would match the natural patterns of speech and draw from the expressive content of the text. Such a style was monody, gestated alongside opera as part of the search for greater expression and emotional power, but the ideals behind the creation of monody had an effect on other genres, not least the polyphonic madrigal. Amongst the composers named by Monteverdi as influences and compatriots are Rore (acknowledged as the 'founder' of the seconda pratica), Cavalieri, Fontanelli, Bardi, Turchi, Pecci, Ingegneri, Marenzio, de Wert, Peri and Caccini (some of whom were members of the Camerata).

For his innovations, Monteverdi was singled out (perhaps unfairly) and criticised heavily by Artusi, who claimed to stand by certain rules – the traditional rules of counterpoint as exemplified in the music of Gioseffo Zarlino, that had been established over a long stretch of time. The key tenets that the theorist wanted to uphold were that all dissonances should be prepared in the correct

[1] Tim Carter, 'The Florentine 'New Music'', in Music in Late Renaissance and Early Baroque Italy (London, 1992), 184.
[2] Gary Tomlinson, Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance (Oxford: OUP, 1987), 23.
[3] Giulio Caccini, Le nuove musiche, printed in Oliver Strunk, Source Readings in Music History, ed. Leo Treitler (London: W.W.Norton & Co., 1998), 370-72.

way and that the 'unity of modality' should be preserved within a piece (that is, a composition should remain within one mode). This particular idea was based on the ancient belief that each mode had a unique expressive character. Although even Artusi went as far as to relax certain rules of counterpoint in his own work, he believed that composers such as Monteverdi had taken too many liberties; each madrigal was seen as an attack on the carefully constructed tradition.

Monteverdi, on the other hand, thought it wrong to judge his compositions only by the rules of counterpoint 'as if they were written by a youth beginning to learn the first species…'[4] He believed that the text should be taken into account in the appreciation of his music. The problem was simply that Artusi refused to acknowledge that vocal music had any special status to allow such deviations from the traditional methods. Implicit within the argument perhaps are the conflicting attitudes of theorist and practical musician, the former believing that music should occupy a purely intellectual realm and the latter who thought that it should be able to please the senses too - indeed, that sensual pleasure should be its primary aim (a dialectic that has, after all, always been at the forefront of the evolution of musical aesthetics).

Broadly, then, although 'seconda pratica' suggests a distinct dichotomy between two styles, it actually describes nothing more than an attitude towards the text that placed the words above all else in importance, and that could apply as much to a polyphonic madrigal as to an opera recitative or monody. This was an attitude taking its cue from Plato's discussion of music's tripartite nature in The Republic[5], though it should be stressed that Monteverdi had little interest in the theoretical, hence his specific labelling of the new approach as a 'practice'. In the words of Monteverdi's brother, Giulio Cesare,

> 'By Second Practice…he [Claudio Monteverdi] understands the one that turns on the perfection of the melody, that is, the one that considers harmony not commanding, but commanded, and makes the words the mistress of the harmony.'[6]

So how did this particular attitude towards the text manifest itself in the music? In a moment I shall explore three of Monteverdi's most expressive madrigals: from Book IV, Sfogava con le stelle and Luci serene e chiare; and from Book V, Cruda Amarilli. Firstly, though, it would help to discuss some general features of Monteverdi's seconda pratica madrigals.

The basic requirement of the Second Practice was that the words be audible, yet even Zarlino was in agreement with this – it was just impossible to achieve satisfactorily in the contrapuntal style: counterpoint was considered to be antithetical to potent affective declamation. Later composers, then, began to adopt a more homophonic texture and, most importantly, took a greater interest in the declamation of words, with 'prominent top parts, more neutral inner parts and a more harmonically conceived bass.'[7] While polyphony is far from absent in Monteverdi's madrigals, his preference for homophonic textures is obvious: at important moments the voices tend to move together. Counterpoint tends to be used either for word-painting effects or to explore particular ideas over a longer stretch of time, following an initial clear and unambiguous statement.

The madrigalists strived also to 'accommodate the syllables at something approaching the rhythm and speed of speech'.[8] This aim was intended to achieve greater expressivity by firstly allowing

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[4] Letter to Giovanni Battista Doni of 23 Oct 1633, in Claudio Monteverdi, Letters, ed. & trans. Denis Stevens, (2nd edn., London: Faber & Faber, 1995), 421.
[5] See Plato, Republic, 398d, 10.
[6] Quoted in Strunk, Source Readings in Music History, 408-9.
[7] Nigel Fortune, 'Monteverdi & The Seconda Pratica', in The New Monteverdi Companion, eds. Denis Arnold, Nigel Fortune (London: Faber & Faber, 1985), 198.
[8] Denis Arnold, 'Seconda Pratica: A Background to Monteverdi's Madrigals' in Music and Letters, xxxviii, (1957), 345.

the words to take control of the rhythm - avoiding the imposed synthetic dance-like meters of popular songs, for example – and, secondly, to attain in music a sense of the natural way of speaking.

And even more important than audibility of the words, according to Denis Arnold[9], was that the meaning of the poem be given by the music. Though homophonic textures allowed for clear declamation of the verse, composers used other techniques to help their music reflect the emotions expressed by the text. There were a number of different approaches to this. Some composers would use literal 'word-painting' to illustrate specific words or to imitate the sounds of nature, though as Galilei related in his 'Dialogue about Ancient and Modern Music' ideally 'the melody must not depict mere graphic details in the text but must interpret the feeling of the whole passage'[10] Word-painting involved chromaticism, dissonance, evocative melodic shaping (characteristic falling figures for the words 'death' or 'sigh', for example) and various appropriate nuances of rhythm or texture. Monteverdi adopted the literal approach for many of his madrigals, though he often avoided it by using a broader brush: using carefully crafted rhetorical devices along with harmony and dissonance to add poignancy to twists and turns of mood, these also acting occasionally as recurring motifs representing particular ideas in the poetry (bittersweet relief or pangs of pain, for example). Often his approach would depend on the quality of the poetry itself: certain texts would only allow for symbolism at a fairly explicit level, while others generated a much more esoteric, profound response in the audience and thus permitted a subtlety of word-setting that formed music of intrinsic expression.

In Monteverdi's music, evidence of the seconda pratica is visible even in the early books of madrigals, though it is from Book IV onwards that some of the most expressive examples can be seen. Within these madrigals, the text as 'mistress' governs the melody, harmony, rhythm, texture and tessitura of the voices; every aspect of the composition, no less, depends on the words for guidance. This occurs at a general level, with the overall 'mood' of the music reflecting the sense of the poetry, but also at an atomic level, with specific words eliciting particular responses in the music, be it in the shape of the melody, a change of texture or a shift of harmony. In his most expressive madrigals, Monteverdi achieved an intimate matching of music to poetry; the rhetoric of the text guiding the rhythm and form of the music and the affections guiding its drama.

Nigel Fortune[11] claims that the opening of Luci serene e chiare [Book IV, No. 8] 'shows Monteverdi's new approach at its most expressive.' Seven bars of homophony open the madrigal; the lucid chords reflecting the 'serene, clear eyes'. [See Appendix for all cited madrigal texts]. Fortune suggests that Monteverdi may have been thinking of the top two parts as singing in duet against a neutral harmonic background – they sing in thirds throughout this passage. The lover's exclamation, 'Voi m'incendete' ('You inflame me.') has more movement, befitting such an evocative utterance, and is repeated with even greater intensity at bars 11-12; the anticipated repetition of 'voi' reveals a breathless yearning. The 'duet' texture here breaks down, leaving the top voice to exclaim the words as a 'solo'. Such variety of texture within a short space of time is typical of the seconda pratica, and this madrigal illustrates the composer's predilection for hierarchic textures.

There is a beautifully shaped melody for the next passage; arch-shaped to match the expressivity of the individual words, peaking in terms of pitch and rhythmic excitement on 'l'incendio diletto,' the most evocative moment in the phrase. The music of the first section is repeated for the next three

[9] Denis Arnold, 'Seconda Pratica: A Background to Monteverdi's Madrigals' in Music and Letters, xxxviii, (1957), 346-7.
[10] Printed in Strunk, Source Readings in Music History,315-19.
[11] Fortune, 'Monteverdi & The Seconda Pratica', 199.

lines of text, though it is raised in pitch by a tone. There are a few alterations to fit the new text, for example some shaping of the word 'Dolci' – 'sweet'.

These two sets of three lines have a similar descriptive formula, which suggests why Monteverdi decided to use the same music. But the last lines of each one text are syntactic antitheses, with the expression of pain and pleasure alternating ('Nell'incendio diletto, non dolore/ Non dolor ne la piaga ma diletto'). The music barely changes. While this almost strophic setting seems contrary to the ideal of text guiding music, the equal treatment of these conflicting ideas may subtly help to illustrate the connection between pleasure and pain, the metaphor implied by the poem.

At bar 39 there is a bright exclamation of 'O miracol d'Amore' in homophonic texture, but then immediately returns to polyphony to describe the soul 'aflame and bleeding', with the composer deliberately exploiting the plosive consonant sounds of 'ch'e tutta foco e tutta sangue' and combining that with a legato setting of 'si strugg'e non si duol, muor e non langue'; bitterness and sweetness are embodied in these contrasting, concurrent phrases. A rising/falling semitone motif adds poignancy to 'strugg'e', once again, the music acting in partnership with the text to achieve a higher level of emotional intensity.

No discussion of the seconda pratica would be complete without an analysis of Cruda Amarilli, the madrigal that caused in particular so much offence to Artusi's ears. The passages he objected to are well documented[12], including the famous section in which the canto enters unpreparedly at a 9th to the bass in bar 13 ('ahi lasso'), and various similar dissonances at bars 20, 36, 41-42 and 53-54. Monteverdi justified these with reference to the text, which speaks of the bitterness of unrequited love.

Silke Leopold[13] rather neatly, if facetiously, explains that Cruda Amarilli should not be seen as an objective description of Mirtillo's pain, but rather the 'musical presentation of a tormented person who…in his sorrow is no longer able to take Zarlino's treatment of dissonances into consideration.' Suzanne G. Cusick develops this idea, relating the pain felt by the character to the difficulties encountered in the singing of the canto part:

> 'Monteverdi requires of the canto unnatural acts…acts of resistance both to the prevailing musical order and to one's own desire to sing in tune, to do what comes 'naturally.' The canto is, at this moment, Amarilli…the cause of his [Mirtillo's] pain.'[14]

Both of these models of interpretation indicate a greater subjectivity in Monteverdi's music, drawing both the singer and the audience into the narrative. Cusick seems to be suggesting that the composer intended to take his singers beyond mere empathy for the characters they represented; he saw them as being those characters. Such an approach – a highly dramatic approach – is so distant from the objective music of the 'academic' contrapuntal tradition that Artusi was defending that one can begin to understand why the theorist failed to comprehend it.

Guarini's poetry is particularly evocative (the text is taken from his pastorale Il Pastor Fido), and exemplifies the choice of text made by Monteverdi and other madrigal composers at this time. With unfulfilled desire being a favourite theme of sixteenth-century composers, along with the plentiful word-painting possibilities and images of nature, Cruda Amarilli was a popular text to be set to music.[15] But the emotions are simply too strong to warrant sticking to Zarlino's rules. There

[12] See Strunk, Source Readings in Music History, 526-534.
[13] Leopold, Monteverdi: Music in Transition, 50.
[14] Suzanne G. Cusick, 'Gendering Modern Music: Thoughts on the Monteverdi-Artusi Controversy' in The Journal of the American Musicological Society, xlvi, (1993), 20.
[15] See James Chater, 'Cruda Amarilli –A Cross Section of the Italian Madrigal' in The Musical Times, cxvi, (1975), 231.

was no holding back for Monteverdi - he wanted the audience to feel the pain through the harshness of the dissonances he applied.

The word-painting in Cruda Amarilli is perhaps less explicit than in Luci serene e chiare, but there is the usual falling motif for the sighing 'ahi lasso' along with an imitative passage for 'Ma de l'aspido sordo' illustrating Amaryllis's being 'wilder and more evasive than the deaf adder'. There is plenty of homophony, as one would expect, though imitative passages appear towards the end, allowing for an extended exploration of the two melodic motifs used for the last two lines of text: 'poi che col dir t'offendo, i' mi morrò tacendo.' Notable here is that each line is given a fairly clear declamation before the two are combined, thus we can hear and understand the words before enjoying some delightful counterpoint to close the piece.

Sfogava con le stelle (Book IV, No. 4) also deals with unrequited love. The poetry, by Ottavio Rinuccini, is of such quality that it needed very little adaptation in the setting to music; there is much less repetition of words than some other madrigals contain. The setting is also distinctive in that sections are notated as falsobordone, as if it were a psalm, without rhythm values such that in performance the declamation is as near as possible to the rhythm of speech.

The texture throughout is fairly homophonic, with the top part often dominating or singing in duet, so that the words are always clear. The direct speech of the fifth line onwards is distinguished from the narrative opening by a move to florid polyphony in bar 15. There are some unusual shifts of harmony; the cadence in C at bars 19-20, for example, comes as a surprise after opening in D minor, and the music is full of anguished dissonances (bar 8, for example, when the bass enters on a G beneath a Bb chord). The conflicting mediant relationship between F major and the dominant of D minor plays a significant role in this music; it is a relationship that Monteverdi often exploited for its disruptive feel.[16] It is used to good effect in bars 35-36, to juxtapose the antithetic antecedent and consequent lines in the text: 'As you show me…her rare beauty (D minor), so show her my burning ardour (F major)' [lines 7-11].[17]

Nigel Fortune is particularly impressed by the conclusion of this madrigal, in which the text of the last line and a half is repeated three times in falsobordone-style. The third declamation on an F major chord, clashes gloriously with the preceding A major chord (bar 55-6), while the figure that follows, with its dissonant falling 5th (Bb is implied by the Bass and Alto while the top two parts suggest F major) is full of the lover's anguish; the yearning for pity ['Pietosa']. And the dissonances and false relations continue until the end, with Cs pitted against C#s in bar 68 and an incredible bass line in bars 59-61 languidly sinking down to a B§ before shifting directly to D major.

Listening to such tormented discordance, one can perhaps appreciate Artusi's complaint that 'the beautiful and purified style is indistinguishable from the barbaric'[18] But, as we have seen, Monteverdi saw no reason not to treat harshness with harshness. As composers chose more and more emotive texts, they needed to find suitable ways of portraying, or even augmenting, the emotions through music. The seconda pratica represented a hugely significant shift in vocal composition away from the supremacy of musical structure and internal coherence towards the ascendancy of words.

[16] Fortune, 'Monteverdi & The Seconda Pratica', 212.
[17] See Gary Tomlinson, Monteverdi and the End of the Renaissance, 92.
[18] Strunk, Source Readings in Music History, 528.

Sfogava con le stelle [Ottavio Rinuccini]
Quarto libro dei madrigali (1603); IV

Sfogava con le stelle
Un inferno d'amore
Sotto notturno ciel
Il suo dolore
E dicea fisso in loro :
O imagini belle
De l'idol mio ch'adoro
Si com'a me mostrate
Mentre così splendete
La sua rara beltate
Così mostrast'a lei
I vivi ardori miei
La fareste col vostr'aureo sembiante
Pietosa si come me fat'amante

Luci serene e chiare [Ridolfo Arlotti]
Quarto libro dei madrigali ; VIII

Luci serene e chiare
Voi m'incendete, ma prov'il core
Nell'incendio diletto, non dolore.
Dolci parole e care,
Voi mi ferite, ma prov'il petto
Non dolor ne la piaga ma diletto.
O miracol d'amore !
Alma ch'è tutta foco e tutta sangue
Si strugg'e non si duol, muor'e non langue!

Cruda Amarilli [Battista Guarini]
Quinto libro dei madrigali (1605) I

Cruda Amarilli, che col nome ancora
d'amar, ahi lasso, amaramente insegni !
Amarilli, del candido ligustro
più candida e più bella,
ma de l'aspido sordo
e più sorda e più fera e più fugace,
poi che col dir t'offendo,
i' mi morrò tacendo…

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